

Temporary Indoor Housing For Injured or Sick Box Turtles

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Housing: A Rubbermaid© or similar plastic tub measuring about 12-16 " W x 24 -30 " L x 12-13" H or larger in floor area – not wall height - works well as temporary winter housing for a single adult box turtle. (Plastic tubs are easy to keep clean, and provide better air flow than an aquarium. DO NOT USE AQUARIUMS FOR BOX TURTLES!) If the walls are translucent, cover the outside with paper or spray paint to make them opaque. Turtles are less anxious when they cannot see through the walls.

Substrate: Use Orchid Moss (long strand sphagnum moss. Box turtles like to dig to feel safe, to control their body temperature and water balance. To accommodate this natural behavior, cover the floor with substrate to a depth of least 3 inches. **Keep it moist**, turtle easily dehydrate, especially young ones. Dehydration is hard on the kidneys (and other bodily functions) and dry air irritates the respiratory tract and eyes. *Ideally, the ambient humidity should be about 60%*. Keeping the soil *moist* helps offset the effects of central heating indoors. You can also add a warm air humidifier to the room as needed.

Follow your veterinarian's instructions for housing sick/injured turtles. Animals with open wounds should be housed on clean, *slightly moistened* towels. Piles of hand towels and washcloths work best, allowing a turtle to "dig" in them and feel safe. Change out the towels every 2 days, or more frequently if soiled.

Hydration: Box turtles love to soak in the water. Be sure their water dish is low sided so the turtle can easily enter and leave the dish. The dish should be large enough for the turtle to fully sit in it, and no deeper than ½ - ¾ inches in water depth. Even if a turtle does not drink, it will passively absorb water through the cloaca. Change the water daily, more often if needed so a clean drink is always available!

If your turtle has a cracked shell or open wounds, consult with your veterinarians about allowing your turtle ad lib access to a water dish. You don't want soiled water to get into any open wounds! If you need to limit water access, a daily soak for 20 minutes should be fine. It may be necessary to flush and redress any open wounds after the soak. Your veterinarian can advise you.

Enrichment: Turtles have many predators in the wild and feel the least stress when they feel hidden from preying eyes. Plain soft silk plant sprigs (available at the Dollar Tree and Hobby Lobby) can be clipped to the sidewalls for the turtle to sit under. They should hang low enough to just brush the turtle's back. Your turtle will feel hidden without blocking valuable overhead full-spectrum light (see "Lighting") and you'll be able to check your pet without disturbing it. This is preferable to a hide box or bark hollow when keeping a turtle indoors. We do not recommend outdoor "outings" for turtles kept indoors. While the fresh air and change of scenery may seem inviting to you, it is stressful for a turtle which must adapt to the change and establish new bearings. A turtle never understands that predators aren't lurking nearby, and it's happiest in a stable, well enriched environment it knows well and controls.

Lighting / Heating: To stimulate appetite, set all lights on a plug-in timer set to mimic mid-summer conditions: 14 hours of light and 10 hours of darkness. A nightlight in the room is fine. The outdoors is not truly black at night!

Ambient Lighting: A 24 to 36 inch Zoo Med Reptisun 10.0 full spectrum UVB fluorescent tube in an appropriate (ballasted) hooded fixture placed atop the tub is a suitable substitute for natural outdoor sunlight and UVB rays. (These types of bulbs emit effective UVB for 9 months although the light portion will continue to illuminate long after the effective UVB rays have dissipated. The tube should be located no more than 18 inches above the substrate.)

Basking: most box turtles love to bask to help them thermoregulate (control their body temperature) and digest meals; attach a clip-on 25-watt spot light (~\$7 at Lowe's / Home Depot) to a sidewall near an artificial plant sprig (so the turtle feels safe) or use a 30 watt spot light (NOT a standard incandescent light bulb which isn't warm enough) in a standard shop clamp fixture.

Ambient Heat: The turtle habitat should maintain a temperature of about 78-80° F during the day and can drop to the upper 60s at night unless your turtle is on medication. While taking drugs, it is best for the temperature to stay close to 80 ° F 24/7 to maximize drug uptake and utilization, and to keep the immune system functioning at full throttle. A red or blue reptile warming light (**not** an infrared or dark ceramic heating light, which can be a fire hazard) can be used at night if needed.

Diet: Box turtles don't like change; so don't be dismayed if your turtle doesn't want to eat for a week or so after moving into a new world (tote). As long as the turtle is in good weight and stays hydrated don't worry. Most box turtles love earthworms (Canadian nightcrawlers available in bait stores and Wal-Mart); they are very nutritious food "packets" and are a good way to start a turtle eating that refuses its regular diet. Later, nightcrawlers can be offered in place of a prepared meal a couple of times a month – it is a yummy addition to the diet, but not essential. Meals - earthworms or prepared meal - should be offered every 2nd or 3rd day. A new diet plan for box turtles will be introduced on the club website in 2015 or sooner – we will keep you posted. Currently, the diet is described at boxturtlefacts.org. It is a combination of a chow designed specifically for omnivorous turtles, like box turtles, with a helping of produce – all the info you need is provided. Larval insects (mealworms, Super Mealies, wax worms) are much appreciated by box turtles but have limited nutritional value and poor mineral content. They should be considered treats; feed only a few, if any, at a meal; *always lightly dust them with a calcium supplement* (see brand below).

Supplements: *Very lightly* dust each meal for your box turtle with a supplement – alternate between Rep-Cal "Calcium with Vit D₃" and Rep-Cal "Herptivite." These are commonly sold in most pet stores. Keep the supplements in a cool, dry location in the house. (*Note – if you are feeding tortoises, use the calcium supplement with each daily feeding except once a week replace it with the vitamin supplement; tortoises convert the beta carotene in the supplement into the active form of Vitamin A much more efficiently than box turtles do, so tortoises need fewer meals supplemented with beta carotene. Too much or too little beta carotene can lead to serious health problems. (See [boxturtlefacts.org/The ABCs of Vitamin A.pdf](http://boxturtlefacts.org/The_ABCs_of_Vitamin_A.pdf))*

Temporary Housing for Box Turtle

Full-spectrum fluorescent overhead light not shown – should be 24-36 inches long

Mini Clip Lamp 25 watt reflector spot (Lowe's / Home Depot: \$7)

Box turtle soaking in ZooMed Repti-ramp Bowl – these plastic bowls are heavy to prevent tipping, slightly rough so turtle won't slip and easy exit and entrance ramps

~19" W x 30" L x 13" H plastic tote
Wal-Mart: \$12.00

"Silk" plants (\$1 at Dollar Tree) clipped to tote wall with 2-in binder clamps (sold at office supplies store); *hang low enough to touch turtle's carapace so he feels safe*

For substrate use moistened long-strand golden sphagnum moss available in the indoor garden area of Lowe's/Home Depot. Or use moistened Garden-time Composted Mulch from Lowe's. Do not use pine or cedar!

ZooMed Repti-ramp Bowl www.petmountain.com \$13 for "Large"

Outside wall spray painted to make opaque; reptiles get nervous when they can see through a barrier (wall)